

# Suggested Bilingual Education Models for Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Young and Adult Learners

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## Abstract

This literature review and suggested education model is designed to stress the significance of bilingual education and integration of Syrian refugees in Turkey, into Turkish education system considering the adaptation processes through acculturation of both young and adult learners in formal and informal settings. In the literature review part, existing bilingual models were presented to reflect on the probable solutions implemented throughout the world and Turkey in specific. Considering all the possible solutions and the emerging issues caused by the influx such as the social integration, economic burden to the government, and cultural adaptation of the refugees, a tripartite bilingual education model has been conceived. For the formal education, sheltered instruction is proposed to be implemented since it leads to integration, not separation. Teacher education in bilingual education in teaching departments is another point that is emphasized as teachers are the ones who contact the refugees in both formal and informal educational settings. As for those without a chance to receive formal education, including young and adult learners in informal education, social and cultural integration to the Turkish society where they will accommodate for an indefinite time period and Turkish language teaching to ease the acculturation process should be highlighted.

*Keywords: Syrian refugees, bilingual education, acculturation, social integration, education model*

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## 1. Introduction

In the world, due to war, famine, and various crises, such as political and economic drawbacks, people, or refugees as given the name to those groups of people who seek for asylum and shelter, face challenges while and when they try to find a new place to call home, even if it is for a temporary period of time. Let alone the difficulties they face in a new country because of lack of knowledge of the system, language barrier, racism they experience make their already difficult lives even more severe, they also struggle with stress, anxiety, and trauma.

Considering its geopolitical location, Turkey accepts and hosts a large number of refugees when it is compared to other neighbor countries of the conflict areas (Ferris & Kirişçi, 2015). The largest number of refugees in Turkey are from Syria because of the influx after the civil war started in 2011. Currently, Turkey hosts almost 3.7 million of registered refugees (UNHCR, 2021). According to the same report of UNHCR, 51% of the refugees are under age who require formal education in the destination country as their fundamental rights declared in Convention on the Rights of the Child, and are under the legislative protection in article 28, sub-articles 1a and 1b (UNICEF, 1989). As they are, the refugee children, are the most vulnerable group in the refugee category (Matthews, 2008), their fundamental needs should be provided by the host country and related organizations.

When arrived to the new country, there are a lot of things to adapt for a refugee, a new-comer. Their socio-cultural, psychological and behavioral integration to adapt and conform to the new environment is vital for a successful acculturation process (Berry & Ataca, 2000; Yu, 2010). Education of refugees, both young and adult, is one of the most important aspects to consider to meet their expectations and needs (Kakkar, 2000). However,

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education of the refugee group should be taken into consideration from various perspectives since it includes economic, social, cultural, psychological, behavioral, societal, political dimensions in it.

In Turkey, for the education of the refugees, Turkish citizenship or residency permit is not needed. If they are documented, they have the right to enroll in the formal K-12 education (MoNE, 2014). In order to create the environment to refugees, especially the Syrian refugees considering their number, to receive proper education, psychological support and social adaptation, language courses for L1 Turkish, Project of Promoting Integration of Syrian Kids into the Turkish Education System (PIKTES) was launched in 2016 which is funded by European Union within the scope of Facility of Refugees in Turkey (FRIT) agreement.

Refugee education is discussed widely especially in the countries where bilingual education is not practiced. Different countries choose different education policies and implement different education models worldwide. In this paper, suggestions for possible education model(s) to be implemented in Turkish education system are going to be discussed. Therefore, possible new methods and ways to utilize different education models (and/or combination of them) will be covered to shed light on bilingual education in Turkey for Syrian refugees.

## 2. Literature

Language cannot be thought separately with culture and society; they are intertwined and affect each other. In refugee education also, teaching the language should be the primary aim since it has the utmost importance when it comes to communication, integration, and actually surviving in the new society (Oikonomidou, 2010). However, obviously in all the host countries there are some prevalent issues needed to be address owing to financial issues, lack of access to materials designed for specifically targeting these groups (Chatty et al., 2014), and teachers who are professionally trained for multicultural and multilingual learners.

### 1. Economic and socio-cultural concerns

Education and education policies cannot be regarded without the consideration of financial, political, societal and cultural dimensions of the host country. Education of the refugees means extra cost, therefore a burden, for the host country which they do not need to undertake alone. As the economic perspectives, having an extra population to provide education means more classrooms, more teachers, and more materials.

Due to the lack of knowledge about the multiculturalism and multilingual education policies, refugee children face integration problem since school has a significant importance on refugee students' adaptation and success when they have positive experiences in there (Noguera, 2004). They come to a country where they do not know the way people live their life, social and cultural norms. Thus, they struggle with the adaptation process as well as the language of the country which is directly and strongly bonded with the social life and culture.

### 2. Acculturation

Acculturation, as in simple terms, is defined as the adaptation and integration process of the new comer to the host/destination country. Schumann (1978) categorized acculturation into two divisions. The first one is when the new comer, or the learners of the new culture and its language not only are integrated but also have a positive attitude toward the community whereas in the second model, even though they are integrated socially, they do not open to the new experiences and the things brought by the new culture and the language to them psychologically (Bekdemir, Kalaycı & Alagözlü, 2021).

In addition to what was suggested by Schumann, Phinney et al. (2001) also have expressed a four-dimensional approach to better understand acculturation types which consist of:

- (a) *assimilation*: shifting from one ethnic identity to a new one (to the target community's).
- (b) *integration*: maintaining one's ethnic identity while identifying a new one (the target community's).
- (c) *separation*: maintaining one's ethnic identity without identifying the new one.
- (d) *marginalization*: giving up both the owned and the target community's identity and acquiring a brand new one for one's self as a part of self-identity.

Acculturation plays a vital role in one's acceptance and integration to a new community to survive in the new society and start a new life there by being an active member of it.

### 3. Existing bilingual education models

Bilingual education is a phenomenon discussed and researchers disagree with each other widely. To end the disputes between different type of bilingual education approaches, Baker (2001) states that "a frequent distinction in

aims is between transitional and maintenance bilingual education.” (p.192). In transitional bilingual education, native language of the minority group is replaced with the L1 of the new society. In maintenance bilingual education, on the other hand, both of the languages, minority group’s language and the target language are used together by valuing the features of the minority group.

There are several bilingual education models under the influence of transitional and maintenance bilingual education approaches implemented and used in the world considering the needs, expectations, political views of the host countries. Submersion (with or without pull-out, and sheltered instruction), Immersion, and Dual Language Bilingual Education are some of the examples will be mentioned in this paper.

### 3.1. Submersion Bilingual Education

Education of the immigrant learners takes place in national formal schools where it is believed they are going to acquire the target language automatically since they are exposed to L2 input all the time in all the lessons of the curriculum.

*In pull-out version*, however, immigrant students do not mandatorily have to take the classes in the curriculum in new L2 since they do not have enough background and language capacity to comprehend the content of the lessons. As an alternative to submersion bilingual education with pull-out, *sheltered instruction*, however, students still take all the lessons in host country’s language, but with a simplified vocabulary to ease their lives in a new learning environment where they have little or no language background and experience.

### 3.2. Immersion Bilingual Education

In immersion bilingual education, immigrant students can still use and be exposed to their own L1 with the integration of L2 (new country’s language) (Cummins, 1998). In immersion, a smooth shift from L1 to new L2 is aimed and slow flow from familiar language to unfamiliar one is mostly tolerated.

### 3.3. Dual Language Bilingual Education

Dual language bilingual education is also known as *two-way immersion*, as its name suggests it consists of the use of both languages: L1 of the immigrants, and L1 of the host country. As Barnett et al. (2007) stated while immigrant students still learn the new target language, students from majority language group also develop their L2 skills.

Additionally, there are also *early* and *late exit bilingual education programs* to be considered. In *early exit programs*, instruction of the courses is in immigrants L1 from one to three years, but at the same time, some L2 (language of the host country is included up to some degree). After maximum of three years, all the instruction they receive turns into the language of the host country entirely. In *late exit programs*, the only difference is to leave L1 behind between the first from the seventh year of arrival and start of education in host country.

Among these different education models, the most appropriate one or the combination of some should be analyzed, tailored, and implemented according to the features and needs of both immigrant group (their age group, genders, home country, language proficiency, cultural traits) and the host country (their culture, economic situation, and education and political policies). However, it is contended that not separating but actually integration those immigrant students into classroom where they can be exposed to the target language and culture works better (Vedder & Horenzyk, 2006).

## 4. Education model(s) for Syrian refugees implemented in Turkey

As of September 2020, according to the numbers provided by Ministry of Interior, Turkey hosts almost 3.7 million Syrians. According to the UNCHR report written in 2019 but updated recently, Syrian immigrant children schooling rate’s increased, and now, in the light of 2020-2021 academic year data results, 61,81 % of Syrian children are a part of education system.

Turkish language training, which is vital to integrate into life and the culture of the host country is also provided to the immigrant groups. Only in 2020-2021 academic year, 404,530 students enrolled in the language learning program (UNCHR, 2019). Moreover, and something interesting, those immigrant children have also had the chance to enroll in Arabic language courses in 2019; 4090 Syrian immigrant children-learners took part in those language courses, and with the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, they had a chance to continue their education through EBA-TV which is the recorded lessons of K-12 provided by the Turkish government in a specific channel for education.

Ministry of National Education (2013) decided to combine Syrian schools run by Syrian non-governmental organizations with the Turkish mainstream education to educate Syrian refugee children. Furthermore, the Syrian schools and courses offered in camps have the Syrian education curriculum in Arabic before transferred to mainstream schools which can be regarded as early exit bilingual education while the other group of Syrian refugees

receiving the education in mainstream Turkish education schools are educated by Turkish national education curriculum as the rest of the country's students (MoNE, 2013).

#### **4. Suggested Education Models for Syrian Refugees in Turkey**

All around the world, as the king of the chess game, teachers are in the center of education. Teachers has a critical role in refugee children's education, their acculturation process (Trueba et al., 1990), their integration (Horenczyk & Ben-Shalom, 2001) to the new school system, society, culture, language learning (Exposito & Favela, 2003), and their socio-cultural and psychological development. However, national education system which consists of bilingual education touch in it, a supportive management mechanism (Richman, 2000), and curricula designed for bilingual education should be implemented and serve as a guide to teachers for successful outcomes.

##### *4.1. Formal Education in Schools*

The main focus of refugee children education should be in formal education settings as their probable departure date is indefinite. Taking into consideration the economic situation and political atmosphere in Turkey where nationalist ideas are emphasized, developing a pure bilingual education design in education system may not be realistic. Considering the needs of the host country, Turkey, and the needs of refugees from Syria, a submersion bilingual education might be implemented in formal education but not in its strong form. The ideal and the most appropriate form of it could be using sheltered instruction for the Turkish national mainstream curriculum. This way, not only receive the immigrant students the same content of education with the rest of the students in the host country in the host country's language, but also thanks to the simplified language and constant scaffolding, they will be able to get the necessary help from the teachers. When they receive the education in mainstream formal education setting, their integration process might be accelerated as they will not be a separated group from the student population of the host country.

When it comes to teacher education, teaching immigrant and/or providing them with bilingual education is not easy for most of the teachers since they have not received the proper and needed training for that. In education faculties and departments, for bilingual education and to multicultural societies which reflect the current and future situation of Turkey after the refugee influx, there should be classes prospective teachers learn different methods and techniques required in bilingual education to children (and adults) from different cultural and language backgrounds.

##### *4.2. Education in Refugee Camps*

Unfortunately, not all of the children cannot be a part of the national education system in Turkey after their arrival. For the ones who are not able to or do not prefer to receive formal education, some courses and integration programs might be offered in refugee camps as Turkey does in camps and Temporary Education Centers (TECs). In those areas, as parallel to the education in formal state schools, a curriculum designed for bilingual students should be implemented so that if they want to pursue their future education in schools, their transition can be easier both for them and the schools/teachers. Moreover, in these courses and education centers, as having the utmost importance, their Turkish language proficiency should be one of the main foci. Their cultural development and social integration should not be ignored; therefore, again as applied in the formal schools' education model suggested above, a sheltered instruction model can be used here by keeping refugee students' acculturation process in mind.

For both students of formal education and the ones in camps, summer language school courses might be offered, and some extracurricular activities may be a part of these courses (Bourgonje, 2010; Nonchev & Tagarov, 2012) so that their adaptation process may be smoother thanks to the lower level of anxiety and socializing opportunities.

##### *4.3. Adult Education for Integrity to the New Language, Society and Culture*

Although the emphasis in this paper has been on the refugee children, their integration, and education, adult education should not be left behind since they are also the newcomers to the destination country and they also need to learn the language, cultural norms of the new society, briefly how to integrate and survive.

Adults may not need a formal education as most of them completed it in their home country. However, in order to survive in a new society as a grown-up, they need to learn the target language. Evening courses can be offered free of charge in an immersive way by Syrian teachers and/or Turkish bilingual teachers who also know Arabic, so support can be taken from L1, Arabic to develop positive attitude towards the new culture and language. In those courses, content and topics covered might be based on participatory approach's implementation in order to help them use it in daily life effectively.

## 5. Conclusion and Discussion

Either by definition or by proxy, no refugee has a choice on the matter of whether or not to become one. It is a fundamental human right to seek refuge in a foreign country in case of humanitarian crisis. Meticulous care should be taken in any efforts to help the transition period by offering relevant education along with other related key services targeted to integrate refugees to the host country. Contingent upon the selection of any current ideal education model by government(s), the selected model should be implemented in due immediacy so as not to lose people and generations on the sole basis of negligent delay.

Considering the needs of bilingual and multilingual teaching awareness, it is axiomatic that teacher education is of paramount significance. Since prospective teachers are to implement the given policies as well as bilingual teaching techniques pertaining to the education system, it is suggested that their formal education and professional development be aptly supported and the importance of bilingual education further emphasized in the corresponding teaching departments to the aim of not leaving anyone behind on a multilaterally humanitarian level.

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